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We're Getting A Tax Break On Our Health Insurance

by Ron Hall, Office of Communications

The new fiscal year is bringing a new financial benefit to federal employees who are enrolled in the federal health insurance program. Effective October 1, 2000, federal employees are getting a 'pretax benefit' on their health insurance premiums.

According to **Eleanor Ratcliff**, USDA's Benefits Officer, federal employees who are enrolled in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program can use pretax dollars to pay their health insurance premiums.

"It's a program called 'premium conversion,'" she explained. "It lets employees deduct their share of health insurance premiums from their taxable income—otherwise known as their gross pay—before those taxes are calculated."

"So that reduces the federal tax bite, as well as most state and local taxes."

Ratcliff added that this calculation is done automatically—and continues automatically unless waived—so employees don't have to sign up for it or take action to initiate it in any way.

Marjorie Rawls, an employee relations specialist with the Office of Human Resources Management, emphasized that 'premium conversion' does *not* affect the amount of the health insurance premium itself, and the federal government is still paying its share of those premiums, as provided by law. Likewise, it does *not* affect the amount of deductions for an employee's federal retirement, Thrift Savings Plan, or life insurance.

She added that 'premium conversion' will not affect the way that an employee's payment for his/her health insurance premium is reflected on the employee's Statement of Earnings and Leave. "The amount of the premium will be the same as it was prior to October 1," she said. "But the net salary—your take-home income—will be slightly higher."

She noted this 'pre-tax benefit' is similar to how an employee's Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)

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*"I still say it needs a popcorn popper," quips **Terry Heide** (left), the communications specialist with NRCS's East Regional Office, based in Beltsville, Md. She just finished checking out the interior of USDA's Mobile Service Center (in background) with **Mark Waggoner** (center), NRCS resource conservationist for Maryland, based in Annapolis, and **Trent Rogers**, FSA loan program specialist. The Mobile Service Center is designed to operate as a USDA 'Field Office on wheels.' It's a new tool to help USDA in its outreach efforts to historically under-served communities across the country. Note the story below.—PHOTO BY BOB NICHOLS*

It's A New Form Of Outreach; It's A 'Field Office On Wheels'

by Ron Hall, Office of Communications

USDA's many Baby Boomers—and maybe also a few Gen X'ers—will recognize a song from the 1960s by [then] teen heartthrob **Ricky Nelson** titled "Travelin' Man." In it, he sings that "I'm a travelin' man, made a lot of stops, all over the world..."

Well, USDA has a travelin' van, and it's getting primed to make a lot of stops, all over America.

The van is more formally called the "USDA Mobile Service Center." It's a new tool in USDA's arsenal to help in its outreach efforts to historically under-served communities across the country.

According to **Steven Rubin**, a loan servicing specialist with the Farm Service Agency who worked on the USDA Mobile Service Center project, the van was an outgrowth of

strategy sessions focusing on outreach by USDA's Service Centers. "One of the most important missions of the more than 2,500 USDA Service Centers," he explained, "is to ensure that under-served groups have equal access to USDA programs and services."

"Outreach is a critical part of USDA's mission," he emphasized.

"One of USDA's goals," added **Trent Rogers**, an FSA loan program specialist, "was to provide tools to USDA's Service Center agencies—FSA, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development—to improve the delivery of information, programs, and services to under-served rural communities nationwide."

The plan was for USDA to use those tools in cooperation with a multitude of partner organizations, such as land grant colleges and universities, State Extension services, Farm Worker organizations, local housing authorities, community health groups, and other groups that work with targeted populations.

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Secretary Dan Glickman



At the request of President **Bill Clinton**, I recently traveled to Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, where I was shocked at the despair and deprivation that prevail in

the daily existence of so many African people—hunger, unemployment, poor health care, limited educational opportunity, and more. It is imperative that the United States and other wealthy nations marshal our resources and do whatever is possible to help Africa beat back these challenges.

But why? Why do we care about Africa? What is the American interest?

For one thing, the United States, as a world superpower, has an obligation to respond to humanitarian crises abroad. On a more pragmatic level, globalization demands that the world's haves reach out to its have-nots. With the fate of nations inextricably linked, hunger and poverty halfway around the world hit closer to home than

ever before. Today's aid beneficiaries are tomorrow's strategic allies and trading partners for our farmers and other businesses. An investment in Africa is an investment in ourselves.

There is hope for African renewal in the coming years. For the first time in the continent's multi-millennia history, the majority of Africans live under democratic governments. More and more, African leaders are releasing their economies from the shackles of state control, opening their borders and adhering to international trade standards.

For all the suffering we saw, we also witnessed our share of successes, examples of African communities empowering themselves with the help of international development assistance. In Kenya, some members of our delegation visited the Nutribusiness Development Project, a woman-owned and operated cooperative that produces nutritious baby food, which is in short supply in Kenya.

The United States has an important role to play in helping Africa move toward continued modernization. We are a key source of food aid, for example. This year, USDA will make approximately one million metric tons

of commodity donations to Africa, nearly triple last year's total.

We will continue to be aggressive in our food aid efforts, but I want to challenge other developed, agriculturally abundant nations to take on more of that responsibility.

We also have to go beyond food assistance to promote overall food security and agricultural self-reliance in Africa. That means encouraging the use of biotechnology, with its ability to generate greater agricultural yields without exploiting natural resources. It means providing technical assistance on dry-land agriculture. And it means transferring our knowledge on everything from land conservation to rural infrastructure to community gardens.

Africa's challenges are immense but not insurmountable. As a matter of both moral urgency and practical self-interest, the entire global community—not just the United States—must redouble its efforts to help Africa find stability and prosperity in the years to come. ♦

'Field Office on Wheels'...continued from pg. 1

"Then," Rogers noted, "USDA would be able to increase awareness for our programs that benefit limited resource, socially disadvantaged, and remotely located communities, groups, and individuals." Those audiences include minority communities, American Indian Reservations, remotely located farmers and ranchers, and targeted rural housing communities across the country.

Accordingly, one of the more unique outreach tools is turning out to be the USDA Mobile Service Center.

"It's basically a USDA 'Field Office on wheels,'" Rubin explained. "It's a 34-foot reconfigured recreation vehicle with three private offices complete with laptop computers, telecommunications devices, Internet capabilities, a printer, a fax machine, and a telephone."

In addition, the interior of the mobile office is large enough to hold training sessions or educational workshops—using training tapes and VCR equipment—for five to six people.

Activities in this 'mobile office' would be scheduled and coordinated from an appropriate USDA state office. Rogers pointed out

that they would include full program delivery activities such as taking applications for participation in USDA programs and services, conducting sign-ups for those programs and services, determining eligibility for participation, and closing loans—all from virtually any location.

He added that, because of satellite communications capabilities, USDA employees working in the van at remote locations are able to link up to their home service centers.

"Another nice 'extra,'" observed **Cheryl Cook**, former Rural Development State Director for Pennsylvania who has served since May 2000 as Executive Officer of the National Food and Agriculture Council, "is that the configuration of the van provides us with the capability to partner with educational, medical, and non-profit groups, as well as local governments, when traveling in rural America." For instance, the van space could easily be 'split' so that one half of the van would be used to provide services to USDA's customers, while the other half of the van could be used to provide blood pressure screenings and other health checkups.

Rubin noted that the Department cur-

rently owns two USDA Mobile Service Centers. They are presently based at USDA's Carver Center in Beltsville, Md. One van was demonstrated at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC this past February, and then again in July. A van also traveled to a USDA field site in Annapolis, Md., in March. It then traveled, for demonstration purposes, to Alabama A&M University in Normal, Ala., Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Ala., and Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Fla.

"The plan is to initiate a pilot in Alabama and Florida," Cook affirmed, "rotating the two vans every six months among the land grant schools within those states—once legal and other administrative matters are finalized."

"Mobility—that is, taking our programs to the people—is key to successfully reaching many of our historically under-served populations, as well as customers who must travel great distances to get to a USDA Service Center," Cook underscored.

"Laptop computers help employees take basic program information to the field—but the van lets us take the whole office," she said. "It's a complete resource for customer service." ♦

The Goal: Get More Golden Dollars Jangling In USDA Employee Pockets

It's called the "Golden Dollar," it depicts Shoshone Indian **Sacagawea** and her infant son **Jean Baptiste**, it has been in circulation since January 2000, the U.S. Mint is encouraging its use—and chances are you have yet to hold one in your hand.

Okay, that's nice to know—but what does it have to do with USDA employees?

"Well, our employees are also consumers and taxpayers, and both of those groups benefit with increased use of this new Golden Dollar," stated **Roger Lancaster**, general manager of USDA's Employee Services and Recreation Association (ESRA), which offers recreational, educational, wellness, and other activities and services to USDA employees at headquarters and field locations. He is among those initiating measures that would encourage individual employees, USDA agencies, and companies servicing USDA employees and customers around the country, to incorporate the use of the Golden Dollar into their activities, as appropriate.

The Golden Dollar, he explained, focuses on **Sacagawea**, the young Shoshone woman who, from 1804 to 1806, assisted explorers **Meriwether Lewis** and **William Clark** on their exploration from North America's great Northern Plains to the Pacific Ocean and back. The reverse side of the coin features a soaring eagle encircled by 17 stars, one for each of the states in the U.S. at the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

It is golden in color, has a smooth edge similar to a nickel, and features an extra-wide border. The coin's features are designed to easily distinguish it, by touch alone, from the **Susan B. Anthony** dollar, which it will replace as the U.S. dollar coin to be used in general circulation. And it is further designed that it can also be used in all vending machines, change machines, ATM machines, and other automated cash handling equipment items that currently accommodate the Susan B. Anthony dollar.

"Each Golden Dollar costs 12 cents to make," Lancaster said. "So the federal government makes a profit of 88 cents for each Golden Dollar that the U.S. Mint distributes to the Federal Reserve Bank." Plus, he noted, each such coin is expected to last an average of 30 years, unlike the 18-month life of the typical dollar bill.

But because of its newness and uniqueness, people who acquire Golden Dollars

Administrative



through normal transactions are tending to hoard them. So USDA is trying to help in their circulation, as appropriate.

For instance, **Teresa Browning**, director of ESRA's retail/Internet operations, said that ESRA operates gift shops in Washington, DC and Kansas City, Mo., for USDA employees. "In early September we talked with our ESRA accountant," she recounted, "and requested that, the next time she processes a change order, she should acquire Golden Dollars to use in change we give our customers."

"And I personally followed up with our ESRA store manager in Kansas City to pursue a similar option there."

Janet Feggins, a manager with Eures, the company which provides cafeteria services to USDA employees in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, said she has conferred with her district manager to initiate measures to acquire Golden Dollars, and then use them as part of the cash mix.

"In addition," she noted, "I've alerted our cashiers that, if they get a Golden Dollar in change, to 'recycle' it to a new customer as soon as they can."

Theodora Ezekwerre, assistant vice president for member services with the Agricultural Federal Credit Union in Washington, DC, said that Golden Dollars have been continually available at the Credit Union since the first shipment of coins arrived earlier this year. "We also distributed them in special promotions in May," she noted, "when children of members opened accounts with us."

"But on a more regular basis, we're encouraging our tellers to *proactively* give out the Golden Dollars to our members—and not merely when asked."

Sandra Anglade, USDA's Employee Recognition Program Manager with the Office of Human Resources Management, said that she is contacting agency-level awards managers, asking that they consider developing strategies that would encourage USDA headquarters and field offices to use Golden Dollars in any appropriate cash awards, employee recognition gifts,

and certificate of appreciation ceremonies.

"Awards programs in the Department generally do not give out actual cash these days, and instead rely on convenience checks or direct deposit," she acknowledged. "But there may be circumstances where Golden Dollars can be given out creatively—and we're encouraging that, Departmentwide."

Greg Super, recreation fee program manager with the Forest Service, said that his agency is considering expanded use of the Golden Dollar when making change at FS offices and recreation fee sites around the country. "But, right now," he pointed out, "our automated ticket machines are already accepting and dispensing Golden Dollars at our parking facilities on the Tonto National Forest outside of Phoenix."

He noted that, in addition, FS personnel at the agency's Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center, located outside of Great Falls, Mont., are already using the Golden Dollar as part of the change mix it provides to visitors.

And individual USDA employees are being encouraged to initiate their own creative activities to promote the use of the Golden Dollar. For instance, **Janet Sledge**, a Communications Coordinator in the Office of Communications, wrote a letter in August to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, or "Metro," which provides bus and subway service in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

"In my letter I advised that I was getting weary of providing change to tourists so they could buy subway cards," she explained. "I requested that Metro consider installing change machines at its subway stations—and that those machines could offer Golden Dollars as change."

And has she received a reply? "A Metro official called me," Sledge advised, "to say that my suggestion had been forwarded to the appropriate division for consideration."

Now, if you're a fan of the paper dollar bill and may be a little troubled by what the future portends with that particular form of denomination, rest easy. The United States Dollar Coin Act of 1997, which authorized creating the Golden Dollar, advises that "Nothing in this Act or [its] amendments...shall be construed to evidence any intention to eliminate or to limit the printing or circulation of United States currency in the \$1 denomination."

This story will resist ending on some lame line like "Go For The Gold"—but you get the idea. ♦



Marketing and Regulatory Programs

Cormorants vs. Catfish In Miss.

It's September—a great time to eat catfish! Heck, *any* time is a great time to eat catfish. But catfish farmers, part of the U.S. aquaculture industry, are facing a threat to their production. However, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service employees are helping them find a solution—and they're employing satellite technology in the process.

The Mississippi Delta accounts for about 70 percent of all catfish production in the U.S. But, according to **Scott Werner**, a research wildlife biologist and the project leader at APHIS's Wildlife Services National Wildlife Research Center Mississippi Field Station in Starkeville, Miss., the problem is that, as America's aquaculture industry has grown, so has the population of migratory birds which feed on fish from farm ponds.

"The bird that's causing the most concern is the double-crested cormorant," he advised. "It can eat about a pound of fish per day, and its numbers have increased to the tens of thousands in the winter migration season." An added factor is that cormorants are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Nonetheless, specialists with APHIS's Wildlife Services Staff are working on an environmentally-sound solution. Werner said that



*"Once I attach this taillight to our boat, then we can head on out to the Mississippi Delta," affirms APHIS's **Brian Dorr**, prior to his participation in a nighttime search in a cypress swamp, looking for double-crested cormorants. —PHOTO BY TERESA HOWES*

Employees make these things...

HAPPEN!

his office is interacting with local, state, and federal agencies, studying the annual movement patterns and behavioral characteristics of cormorants.

"This will help us understand how those factors impact on catfish production," he pointed out. "And the approach we use helps us meet the public's demand that we be ecologically and socially responsible."

Specifically, APHIS's wildlife specialists rely on battery-operated transmitters—which they fit right onto the birds. **Tommy King**, an APHIS research wildlife biologist at the Station, said that the transmitter is about the size of—and looks similar to—a backpack. "It is brown in color and has a six-inch antenna, and the part touching the bird is spongy and rubbery," he noted.

But, King acknowledged, because the birds are so smart and can identify the shape and color of vehicles, clothes, boats, and people, he and his APHIS colleagues must use a capture method that allows them to get near the birds to be outfitted. According to King, the biologists watch the calendar and wait until there is limited moonlight in the evening.

Brent Harrel, an APHIS wildlife technician at the Station, said that an APHIS boat, outfitted with bright lights, helps the specialists maneuver through cypress swamps—located close to catfish farms—where the cormorants rest. "The bright lights also disorient the cormorants," he explained. "This causes them to dive—and that's when our biologists can gather individual birds in a net."

Six to seven birds are carefully taken to shore where biologists record their weights and other related measurements, and then outfit them with gear. "We'll actually tie the transmitter on like a little backpack, and it doesn't bother them a bit," Harrel said. "Through the transmitters we're able to get migration routes of the birds and the location of cormorant nests."

And how is that information transmitted?

"Through satellite telemetry, the data is actually transmitted from a satellite to a ground station, and then through e-mail—all right from the transmitter on the bird—to one of our APHIS biologists, no matter where the bird is, anywhere in the world," Harrel said.

APHIS specialists are using that tracking data to develop management strategies that protect wildlife, fish farmers, and the environment.

In addition to the satellite telemetry,



*"This cormorant's bill length is 57 millimeters," concludes APHIS's **Tommy King**, as he gently and carefully measures and then records the length of beak, weight, and other related measurements of yet another cormorant, prior to fitting it with a transmitter.*

—PHOTO BY TERESA HOWES

APHIS's biologists have been testing new ways to disperse the birds away from the catfish—in a non-lethal fashion. **Greg Ellis**, an APHIS aquaculture biologist at the Station, said that one such tool they're employing is the 'Desmond laser.' "It generates a red beam about one centimeter in diameter," he explained. "The beam is aimed at the birds at night, while they're sleeping near the catfish farms, to in effect, 'shoo them away'."

"It's a silent and non-lethal approach that doesn't disturb other wildlife, like firearms and pyrotechnics tend to do," he added. "And it's very effective, particularly in waterfowl sensitive areas."

Brian Dorr, an APHIS wildlife biologist at the Station, works closely with the cormorants as well as with farmers in the catfish industry. "Those farmers want to use a good ecologically sound approach to dealing with the double-crested cormorant," he observed. "We, as wildlife biologists, are helping them to come up with solutions to manage the problem—while still peacefully coexisting with the bird."

—TERESA HOWES



Natural Resources and Environment

Beam Me Up, Scully?

All you fans of the popular TV show "The X-Files" know that the season ended last May 21. In an episode titled "Requiem," FBI agents **Mulder and Scully** returned to the scene of their first investigation seven years ago—and they encountered a UFO that may spell "the end of their relationship." More specifically, Mulder found himself trapped out in the woods, on the other side of what looked like a wall of petroleum jelly, and on the verge of being "beamed up." At the same time, he was rendered invisible to Scully, who was on the other side of that 'wall.'

That's all well and good—but what's it got to do with USDA?

The answer: that season finale episode was filmed on the San Bernardino National Forest, located about 60 miles east of Los Angeles.

The show, which was filmed in early May, included a spaceship, levitation, and abduction by aliens.

"It was interesting to see just how they made the forest appear to be burning, and to watch them do the stunts involved with the show," said **Jim Ahearn**, the Forest Service's Battalion Chief on the Mountain Top Ranger District on the San Bernardino National Forest. His role was to serve on 'fire prevention standby,' "in case any of the pyrotechnics or any other special effects got out of hand" and started a fire on the National Forest.

"But overall," he noted, "there weren't any glitches, and nothing went wrong."

"20th Century Fox gave the San Bernardino National Forest mention in the credits, and that is unusual for a television series," observed **Betty Hartenstine**, FS's special use coordinator for the Mountain Top Ranger District. She noted that several movies, including "Parent Trap" and "Magnolia," as well as commercials and documentaries, have used the San Bernardino National Forest for location shooting in recent years.

So if you missed the original airing of the "Requiem" episode of "The X-Files" and want to see that recognition of the San Bernardino National Forest in the credits at the end of the show, it is scheduled to be rebroadcast on October 29—assuming that the baseball World Series is over by then.

And then, when the fall season begins

anew, we can all learn what Mulder's fate is—and whether the San Bernardino National Forest played a role in that outcome.

Stay tuned.

—LENORE WILL



Research, Education, and Economics

Floods Recede; Mental Scars Stay

"We don't want to cut people too short—letting them talk helps people recover."

Brad Cogdill was referring to victims of a storm system that deluged the Red River Basin near Fargo, N.D. and Moorhead, Minn., last June. It caused an unexpected flood in the two border counties—Cass County, N.D. and Clay County, Minn.—where those two cities are located, respectively.

And even now, three months after that flood, Cooperative Extension system employees are helping out in the recovery process—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Cogdill is an Extension agricultural agent and district director in the Cass County, N.D., Extension Service office. "One of the things I find unique about disaster programming is that it takes longer to answer questions," he observed. "People need to tell their story about what happened to them, and there is so much emotion involved."

And, thanks in part to a Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service Special Needs grant for \$60,000 that was awarded in August, Extension staff in both North Dakota and Minnesota can further their assistance. According to CSREES Assistant Administrator for Program and Analysis **A.J. Dye**, the monies are being shared by both states and are being used to hire additional personnel who will work with the public on flood recovery education and assistance, to include longer-term efforts to educate the public about counseling and other services available from various agencies.

That geographical area has a track record of having to cope with devastating floods. According to **Becky Koch**, an information specialist in North Dakota State University's Department of Agriculture Communication in Fargo, both states dealt with flooding during the 1997 Red River floods and were able to use knowledge gained during the 1993 flooding of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. The August-September 1993 issue of the **USDA News** carried a story about USDA employees

involved in the recovery efforts following the "Great Flood of '93."

Nancy Frosaker-Johnson, an Extension educator for family and consumer science in the Clay County, Minn., Extension Service Office, advised that past experience has shown that emotional scars from such disasters linger long after the material damage has been fixed. As an example, she said, preliminary evaluations from the 1997 flood indicate that emotional recovery is a slow process.

"The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has been evaluating the impact of that flood on mental health issues," she said. "Unfortunately, the results suggest that domestic abuse, alcohol problems, truancy, and more people seeking counselors have skyrocketed since the 1997 flood."

"The financial and emotional strain takes a toll not just on adults, but also on children," she added. "So, in the aftermath of these recent floods in June, we've been getting out the message of the importance of victims taking care of themselves, getting plenty of rest, eating right, and spending time with family and friends."

—KATIE SMITH

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Anthony Haynes was named as the deputy administrator for program policy and telecommunications in the Rural Utilities Service. He succeeded **Chris McLean**, who held

that position from January 1998 until July 2000, when he was sworn in as the RUS administrator.

From March 1997 until his appointment in July 2000, Haynes served as a confidential assistant to the RUS administrator, where he concentrated on such issues as electric industry restructuring, telecommunications, and electronic commerce. From 1993-97 he was a confidential assistant for congressional relations in the Office of the Secretary, where he served as the liaison between the secretary of agriculture and Congress on issues concerning the Forest Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and pesticides.

From 1991-93 Haynes served as the director of government affairs for the Washington, DC-based National Association of Conservation Districts, which represents the nation's nearly 3,000 local soil and water conservation districts. He worked as a legislative specialist for the Lower Mississippi Delta Development Center, based in Memphis, Tenn., from 1990-91, where he concentrated on issues related to poverty and economic decline of the lower Mississippi Delta region. He previously worked at the Center as a staff analyst from 1989-90.

A native of Trenton, Tenn., where he grew up on a family farm which raised cattle and cash grains, Haynes holds a B.S. degree in agriculture from the University of Tennessee in Martin, Tenn., and a Master of Public Administration degree from Memphis State University—now the University of Memphis. ♦



Randy Phillips was selected as the deputy chief for programs and legislation in the Forest Service. He succeeded **Ron Stewart**, who served in that position from August 1997 until he retired in December 1999, following over 30 years of service with FS.

From January 1997 until his selection, Phillips served as the budget coordinator for FS's National Forest System, at the agency's headquarters office in Washington, DC. He was based in Asheville, N.C., as the forest supervisor for the four national forests in North Carolina—the Croatan, Nantahala, Pisgah,

Editor's Roundup

USDA people in the news

and Uwharrie National Forests—from 1993-97. During that period he chaired the Southern Appalachian Man in the Biosphere program, a consortium of 13 federal and state agencies that work together for sustainable management of natural resources in the southern Appalachian area of the country. In addition, during 1996 he chaired the Natural Resources Leadership Institute, based at North Carolina State University, which helps train individuals to find solutions to environmentally-oriented concerns in their local communities. He served as deputy forest supervisor, based in Asheville, from 1990-93.

Phillips was an assistant to the regional forester in the agency's Northern Region, based in Missoula, Mont., from 1988-90, where he managed the region's Appeals and Litigation Program. From 1985-88 he worked as a district ranger on the Pike National Forest, based in Denver, after having worked from 1983-85 as a district ranger on the Pawnee National Grassland, based in Greeley, Colo. He worked as a forester in Idaho Springs, Colo., on the Arapaho National Forest from 1981-83. He began his career with FS in Greenville, Calif., as a forester on the Plumas National Forest in 1978.

A native of Lakeland, Fla., Phillips holds a B.S. degree in forest resource management from the University of Montana and a B.A. degree in political science from Florida State University. ♦



Bill Hudnall was selected as the deputy administrator for marketing and regulatory programs-business services in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. He succeeded

Phyllis York, who served in that position, first in an acting capacity and then officially, from 1994 until she retired in September 1999, following 16 years of service with APHIS.

From November 1996 until his selection, Hudnall served as assistant deputy administrator of the Office of Policy, Program Development, and Evaluation in the Food Safety and Inspection Service. He was deputy administrator for administrative management in

FSIS from 1983-93 and from 1994-96. From 1993-94 he was FSIS associate administrator.

Hudnall served as the personnel director for FSIS from 1978-83, after having served as the personnel director for APHIS from 1977-78. From 1971-77 he worked for FSIS as a personnel staffing specialist, a classification specialist, and then as a personnel management specialist. He worked as an employment representative for United Airlines from 1966-71, based in Washington, DC, Atlanta, Chicago, and finally in New York City.

A native of Northumberland County, Va., Hudnall holds a B.A. degree in mathematics from the University of Virginia. ♦



John Williams was selected as the deputy administrator for management in the Farm Service Agency. He succeeded **George Aldaya**, who held that position, first as the acting

deputy administrator for management and then as the deputy administrator for management, from September 1995 until March 1999, when he became the deputy director of the Office of Operations.

From July 1998 until his selection, Williams served as FSA's assistant deputy administrator for management. He was director of the agency's Management Services Division from 1995-98.

Williams served as the deputy assistant administrator for management in the Foreign Agricultural Service from 1988-95. From 1983-88 he was director of FAS's Budget and Finance Division, after having served as chief of the Budget Branch in that Division from 1976-83. From 1970-76 he worked as a budget analyst for the agency. He began his career with FAS as a management intern in 1969.

A native of Dallas, Pa., Williams holds a B.A. degree in political science from King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. ♦



Joe Reilly was selected as the deputy administrator for field operations in the National Agricultural Statistics Service. He succeeded **Fred Barrett**, who served in that position from April

1995 until he retired in May 1999, following nearly 36 years of service with NASS. **Ron Bosecker**, [then] director of the agency's Research Division, served as acting deputy administrator for field operations in the interim, until he was selected as NASS's administrator

in December 1999.

From February 1997 until his selection, Reilly served as director of NASS's Census Division. In that position he was responsible for conducting the 1997 Census of Agriculture—which was the first Census of Agriculture in history that was conducted by USDA, not the U.S. Bureau of the Census. He was assistant director of the Census Bureau's Agriculture Division from 1993-97, where he directed the majority of the operations of the 1992 Census of Agriculture—which, by law, is conducted every five years. From 1991-93 he served as chief of the Census Bureau's Automation and Implementation Branch for Field Operations, where he was responsible for introducing computer-assisted interviewing for the Census Bureau's monthly labor force survey.

Reilly worked as a program manager in the Census Bureau's headquarters office in Washington, DC, from 1987-91, where he was responsible for the procurement and installation of the automated systems at all of the Census Bureau's 460 field offices involved in conducting the 1990 Decennial U.S. Population Census. He began his career with the Census Bureau in 1975 as a survey statistician in the agency's regional office in Atlanta.

A native of Tamaqua, Pa., where he grew up on a family farm which raised dairy cows, chickens, and corn, Reilly holds a B.S. degree in statistics and marketing from Pennsylvania State University. ♦



Ron Routzahn sure does like to fish—and, when he's settled in his favorite fishing spot deep in the forest, nothing is gonna keep him from enjoying that moment. Not even bears. And not even if his clothes get shredded.

Routzahn, a program specialist with the Food and Nutrition Service's field office in Helena, Mont., had hiked with several others into an old fishing haunt on the fringes of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, on the Helena National Forest in central Montana. It was a familiar stretch of the Big Blackfoot River, a place revered by members of the Routzahn family. In fact, according to **Craig Forman**, the public affairs director for FNS's Mountain Plains Region based in Denver, a plaque affixed on the side of a cliff above the river bank commemorates the Routzahn pioneer homestead, which is located about 12 miles away and dates back to the late 1800s.

Routzahn removed his new red and green flannel shirt and hung it on a branch of a nearby tree. He then waded into the river to look

for small bugs to use them for bait.

When he had a handful of bait, Routzahn stood up and looked toward the shore. There, lurking over the shoulder of a member of his fishing party who was standing on the shore, was the huge brown head of a grizzly bear, scarcely 30 yards away.

"Dave," Routzahn called calmly, "come here."

"Nothing doing, Ron. The water's too cold."

"Come here, I said. Now," Routzahn insisted.

"Forget it," came the reply.

"Then turn around. There's a bear right behind you."

The colleague turned his head to look—then quickly spun his head back. Moving slowly, he stepped into the stream, and all four members of the fishing party began yelling loudly, hoping to scare the bear away.

The grizzly turned abruptly and ran off into the woods. Routzahn then cautiously stepped out of the river and walked over to where he had hung his shirt. He found it lying on the ground.

"When I picked it up and eyeballed it," he recounted, "I saw lots of daylight in several places." In fact, the bear had ripped out one of the armpits and had torn holes in the fabric. And the new hiking shoes of a member of the fishing party were both full of holes, punched clean through by the bear's incisors.

Now, most people would have hightailed it out of the woods at this point, back to the trail-

head and the pickup waiting there.

"But dadgumit," Routzahn declared, "we drove 45 miles to fish our favorite spot—and no bear was going to ruin it for us."

He added that he is familiar with grizzlies, he understands them, and he knows that they simply want to be left alone—which was exactly what the fishing party had in mind.

The fishing group then moved to another spot upstream—when the bear appeared again, sitting on its haunches, watching them. "I gave a whistle—don't ask me why, now that I think about it," he acknowledged, and the bear headed toward the group.

"Well, the stream was noisy, and grizzlies characteristically have bad eyesight," Routzahn observed. "So we kept quiet and stood still—and the four of us may have merely resembled small trees to the bear."

"Plus, the bear was upwind, which certainly helped us," he quipped.

The bear then camped on an island in the stream for over two hours—"and that's the exact spot where we wanted to be" Routzahn advised. It then finally crossed over to a cliff above the stream, and went away.

"We just out-waited the bear, eventually caught lots of fish, and had some great war stories—which we all recount frequently, when we're deep in the woods sitting around a campfire," he laughed. ♦

A Tax Break...continued from pg. 1

contributions are treated for tax purposes. In addition, many USDA employees at headquarters and field locations are participating in a 'transit incentive' program, which authorizes monetary incentives to employees who use qualifying forms of public transportation to commute to and from their USDA workplace. One such form of transit incentive offers a similar 'shelter' from taxes of a certain defined amount of an employee's mass transit costs. The September 1999 **USDA News** carried a story describing those two similar 'pre-tax benefits' to USDA employees.

Most USDA employees will first see this change in the salary payment that is reflected in their Statement of Earnings and Leave for Pay Period No. 21.

Rawls pointed out that this new 'pre-tax benefit' is only for active federal employees. "This benefit does not extend to retired federal employees," she said.

She noted that, for some employees who

pay Social Security taxes—in other words, employees enrolled in the Federal Employees Retirement System, or FERS—this 'premium conversion' benefit may actually result in lower Social Security benefits. In those situations, employees may wish to consider exercising the option to waive 'premium conversion.'

"But for most employees in that situation," Rawls said, "sheltering tax dollars still offers greater monetary benefits to employees. Put another way, the small reduction in Social Security benefits is greatly outweighed by the much larger tax savings."

"So those employees should think twice before waiving 'premium conversion.'"

"And," she quipped, "if you're not in the habit of opening your Statement of Earnings and Leave envelope as soon as you get it, you may want to jump right on your Statement for Pay Period Number 21—and calculate how much money is now going back into your pocket." ♦

EDITOR'S NOTE: This "Letters" section is an opportunity for USDA employees to communicate with Secretary **Dan Glickman**, through questions or comments, on matters that would be appropriate and of general interest to USDA employees across the country. He invites employees to use this particular forum in the **USDA News** to communicate with him, by using the following mailing address: "Letters," Sec. Dan Glickman, USDA, STOP #0190, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250.



"Hold on, I just about have this transmitter attached to the bird's back," notes APHIS's **Tommy King** (right), as APHIS's **Brian Dorr** gently and carefully holds a double-crested cormorant in his gloved hands. They are outfitting the cormorant with a transmitter so they can monitor the migration routes of cormorants and the location of cormorant nests. It's one step in an APHIS strategy to use environmentally sound solutions to keep cormorants from feasting on catfish that are raised by catfish farmers, as part of the U.S. aquaculture industry. At the same time, APHIS's overriding goal is to manage the problem—while still peacefully coexisting with the bird. Note the story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY TERESA HOWES**

U.S. Department of Agriculture
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HELP US FIND

Holli Hendrick

Missing: 7-19-00

From: Springfield, IL

D.O.B. 11-17-82

Sex: Female

Hair: Brown

Eyes: Blue

Height: 5' 5"

Weight: 130 lbs.

If you have information, please call

1-800-843-5678

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

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Awareness Showcase Conference

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